

3 CBS News-TV Guide Dispute

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Last summer, CBS News investigated CBS News to protect the integrity of CBS News. The resulting report attempted to respond to charges by TV Guide that a 1982 CBS News documentary on Gen. William Westmoreland was a "smear."

But the unusual tactic of a formal in-house investigation and the subsequent admission of some procedural mistakes by CBS News did not make the accusations go away. In fact, they resurfaced in the past two weeks.

"Our credibility is our entree into the living rooms of America," said CBS News President Van Gordon Sauter last July, after releasing summarized findings of the Benjamin Report, the internal inquiry conducted by Burton Benjamin, CBS News' senior executive producer for hard-news broadcasts.

This same journalistic credibility, plus a \$120 million libel lawsuit filed by Westmoreland against CBS News, apparently were the background forces sparking recent back-and-forth charges by CBS News and TV Guide.

CBS News had waited almost a year before it publicly attacked the TV Guide story of last May 29, entitled "Anatomy of a Smear." The story questioned the way CBS News went about proving the thesis in its "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception" that Westmoreland led a conspiracy to fabricate enemy troop figures during the Vietnam War.

Then last month, the story won the award for distinguished magazine reporting from Sigma Delta Chi, the Society of Professional Journalists.

"We're not attempting to tear down the article," Gene Mater, CBS News' senior vice president for communications and news practices, said Monday. "We're responding because somebody gave them an award."

In a March 28 letter to The Quill, Sigma Delta Chi's magazine, Sauter said the TV Guide story "deserves closer examination." Sauter cited three "serious errors within the article," illustrating a "shocking disregard for the truth."

The points he disputed were that:

TV Guide quoted George Allen, a former CIA official interviewed on the program, as saying he no longer agreed with the premise of the documentary.

TV Guide attempted to depict Sam Adams, a former CIA analyst interviewed on the program and a paid CBS News consultant on the project, as having disavowed the documentary's thesis.

TV Guide also implied that an interview with Col. Gains Hawkins, former U.S. Army Order of Battle Chief in Vietnam, was edited to misrepresent his views on enemy manpower ceilings.

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